

The New Plays

Faversham's
Iago the Apple
of His Eye.

BY CHARLES DARNTON.

A Iago who ate an apple as he bantered succulent words with Rodorigo; an Iago who chucked his wife under the chin and then choked the strawberry-marked handkerchief out of her; an Iago who laughed out of the corner of his mouth and twinkled out of the corner of his eye; an Iago who leered like the devil out of a curiously sudden "dark scene" after his dark deeds had ended in the murder of Rodorigo—this was the Iago with which William Faversham defied tradition and glorified youth at the Lyric Theatre last night.

Not your idea? No, of course not! You've always thought of "Othello" as a throttling tragedy, haven't you? It has never even occurred to you to take it in the spirit of riotous melodrama. But schoolboy ideas change with the times. I realized this last night as never before. For a long time, after shuddering through the first reader of the drama, I had thought "Othello" obvious. But not until last night had I seen it in the light of rolicking tragedy. That Desdemona was smothered with the traditional pillow and then stabbed by her liege to keep her from talking, when it was high time for her to die like a lady, was to be accepted as a

bloody Shakespearean detail. The significant fact was that Faversham remained debonair to the last. And it is worthy of note that when Othello raised his dagger above Iago and a woman in the gallery cried "Kill him!" the audience raised a laugh in appreciation of what he deserved. But there was something more than this in the acting of the final scene, which brought the performance up to a higher standard than it had reached at any other time. First praise for the powerful sweep that at the end carried the play beyond the light touch of Mr. Faversham belongs to Miss Constance Collier, whose Emilia stood out as the most vivid and dramatic figure of the evening.

Leaving this dark-eyed goddess of the stage to her own for the moment, it is only fair to give credit to Mr. Faversham for his success in making Shakespeare popular, both in his curiously engaging interpretation of a character associated in the common mind with inhuman cunning and in a production so pictorial that in costume, more than in scenery, it seemed like a futuristic preparation for Shakespeare. Scenically, beginning with a beautiful view of Venice, the production as it was painted and dreamed was more eloquent than the acting up to the point where Cassio gets drunk in short order and that good old brawl at sword-point disturbs Othello's rest. Mr. Faversham worked up this noisy row so well that it counted as the first stroke for success, and although Pedro de Cordoba had done nothing to distinguish himself as Cassio in the earlier scenes he acted his drunken scene very well indeed.

While Mr. Faversham gave no dignity to the performance, it was interesting to observe the difference between his really gorgeous production of Shakespeare's tragedy of jealousy and the less spectacular one that Forbes-Robertson offered a few weeks ago. Everything was so widely different that comparison had a fair field. Last night Othello seemed at first merely a necessary virtue to the evil of Iago, and while this peculiar state of affairs continued to exist that roaring old war-horse of other days and other plays, R. D. MacLennan, suggested nothing so much as a stupid

ez. But he had voice, as well as physical hugeness, and as voice is the main thing with Othello, he managed finally to assert himself and then died with glory in that excellently acted last act. The monotony of his reading was relieved by clear-



William Faversham as Iago.
Constance Collier as Emilia.

ness of diction and, although the stage tricks of the peculiarly reactive Iago must have been a thorn in the side of Othello, distracting him as well as the audience when he tried to have a moment alone with Desdemona, Mr. MacLennan made himself felt as he throttled Iago. But his address to the senators was so tame that I couldn't help suspecting him of purposely "playing down" out of consideration for the actor whose name was in big type.

The wisdom of Mr. Faversham in

choosing the role of Iago is not to be questioned. But for the sake of contrast he should have insisted on having Othello as black as he is usually painted, for, oddly enough, this Othello was scarcely a shade darker than the Iago. And, personally, I must confess I like a black Othello. In my opinion, an Othello of pronounced color gives the play the dark aspect it needs. When Mr. Faversham moved out of the limelight only his shaven figure enabled one to distinguish him from the Moor. He was a strangely, jaunty, swaggering Iago, with springs in his knees and hinges on his elbows, and even when he was not indulging in fruit it could plainly be seen that he was the apple of his eye. Yet he won his audience, and by this token he made Shakespeare popular.

Miss Constance Collier was an indifferent Desdemona, except for the scene in which she awaited her doom. Here the poignancy of her acting reached the heart. At all other times

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she was lamentably uncertain and generally indistinct because of a very bad habit of dropping her voice at the end of every sentence. On that fine brow of Miss Collier was stamped the real triumph of the evening as she surged into Emilia's tempestuous scene after the murder of Desdemona. Her flaming defiance was a splendid exhibition of acting. It is seldom one sees so handsome an Emilia, and, moreover, one whose beauty and distinction are backed by power and intelligence. The Rodrigo of George C. Romme lacked nothing but skirts to make it utterly effeminate, and other members of the cast were disappointing.

On the whole, however, Mr. Faversham's production is so strikingly beautiful that it commands admiration, and his Iago is an altogether fascinating villain, who snaps his fingers at tradition.

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